

**Proclamation 7144—National
American Indian Heritage Month,
1998**

October 29, 1998

*By the President of the United States
of America*

A Proclamation

American Indians and Alaska Natives—the first Americans—have made enormous contributions to the life of our country. When the first Europeans arrived on this continent, they did not find an empty land; they found instead a land of diverse peoples with a rich and complex system of governments, languages, religions, values, and traditions that have shaped and influenced American history and heritage. Generations of American Indians have served and sacrificed to defend our freedom, and no segment of our population has sent a larger percentage of its young men and women to serve in our Armed Forces. But American Indians are not just an important part of our country's past; they are also a vital part of today's America and will play an even more important role in America's future.

There are more than 2 million American Indians living in our country today, from the hardwood forests of Maine to the Florida Everglades, across the Great Plains to the Pacific Coast, and throughout the State of Alaska. Through a variety of innovative enterprises, many tribes are sharing in the unprecedented prosperity our country enjoys today, prosperity that is reflected in the construction of community centers, schools, museums, and other cultural centers. However, many people who live in Indian Country are caught in a cycle of poverty made worse by poor health care and a lack of educational and employment opportunity. If we are to honor the United States Government's long-standing obligations to Indian tribes, we must do all in our power to ensure that American Indians have access to the tools and opportunities they need to make the most of their lives.

As part of this endeavor, my Administration has strengthened the special government-to-government relationship between the Federal Government and the sovereign

nations of Indian Country, expanded the role of American Indians and Alaska Natives in the Administration, and sought to increase educational opportunities and economic development throughout Indian Country. Earlier this year, I signed an Executive order directing the Federal Government to work together with tribal and State governments to improve Native American achievement in math and reading, raise high school graduation rates, increase the number of Native American youth attending college, improve science education, and expand the use of educational technology. We are also striving to boost economic development in Indian Country by working with tribal governments to meet their technology infrastructure needs, to coordinate and strengthen existing Native American economic development initiatives, and to help Native Americans obtain loans more easily for building homes and starting new businesses.

Today's Native Americans are among the youngest segments of our population—a new, large generation of young people who, if empowered with the education, skills, opportunity, and encouragement they need to thrive, can lead Indian Country into a future as bright and promising as its extraordinary past. As we observe National American Indian Heritage Month, let us resolve to work together to make that future a reality.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 1998 as National American Indian Heritage Month. I urge all Americans, as well as their elected representatives at the Federal, State, local, and tribal levels, to observe this month with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-ninth day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

William J. Clinton

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Proclamation 7145—National Adoption Month, 1998

October 29, 1998

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

Every child deserves a safe and loving family. But each year, thousands of American children grow up without such families, lacking the stability and sense of permanency they need to thrive. More than 100,000 such children— orphaned, abandoned, abused, or unable to remain at home for other serious reasons—will need homes in the next few years. Although foster care provides a good supportive temporary environment for these children, adoption can provide them with the sustained love and care of permanent families and can give adults the chance to open their hearts and homes to a child they will cherish.

My Administration has worked hard both to improve the experience of children awaiting adoption and to increase their chances of adoption. Last November, I signed into law the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, which made sweeping changes in our Nation's child welfare system. This legislation underscores the importance of safety and permanency for children awaiting adoption and focuses on the urgency of finding adoptive families. In addition to achieving passage of this landmark legislation, we have made adoption easier by barring discrimination by race or ethnicity, by providing a tax credit for newly adoptive parents, and by ensuring that adoptive parents are covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act.

We must strengthen such efforts if we are to meet our national goal of doubling the number of adoptions by the year 2002. In addition, while adoption in America has increased in recent years, more than 25,000 young Americans each year reach the age of 18 and leave the child welfare system without permanent homes or families. This statistic tells us that we still have much to do. We must not only secure the placement of young

children in families, but also move aggressively to place in permanent families our older children, as well. I have directed the Federal Government to work with State and local governments to continue identifying and removing the barriers that prevent young people from moving from our child welfare system into adoptive families.

Working together—policymakers, government officials, family welfare agencies, religious and community organizations, and families—we can make a difference in the lives of thousands of children. My Administration will continue to support efforts to recruit and strengthen adoptive families and to shorten the time it takes to move children from foster care to permanent homes; to reduce the backlogs in our Nation's juvenile and family court systems; and to promote strong, supportive adoption programs that meet the needs of every child.

During National Adoption Month, let us recommit ourselves to the goal of finding a safe, permanent, and loving home for every child in need. Let us also honor the many caring families across our Nation who have opened their arms and their hearts to a child through adoption. By making such a profound and loving commitment to our Nation's most vulnerable children, they are also making a lasting investment in America's future.

Now, Therefore, I, William J. Clinton, President of the United States of America, by virtue of the authority vested in me by the Constitution and laws of the United States, do hereby proclaim November 1998 as National Adoption Month. I urge all Americans to observe this month with appropriate programs and activities to honor adoptive families and to participate in efforts to find permanent, loving homes for waiting children.

In Witness Whereof, I have hereunto set my hand this twenty-ninth day of October, in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and ninety-eight, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and twenty-third.

William J. Clinton

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